

1. Introduction

OVERVIEW

Planning Amherst Together represents a historic and timely opportunity for the Town to create and adopt a Master Plan. The Plan serves as the community's "blueprint" for the future, which will guide decision-making related to Amherst's physical development.

The Master Plan is based on both intuitive input and technical information. A series of public meetings and workshops were conducted to gather public input. A series of technical memoranda were also prepared to collect and present pertinent information needed for formulating the plan. The technical memoranda prepared during *Planning Amherst Together* have been assembled to create this Existing Conditions Report.

A community's existing conditions provide an important foundation for making policy recommendations. This document outlines key data and indicators that describe the Amherst community and have helped to inform the Master Plan. It examines historical data and current trends, as well as projections for the future when available. The information has largely been compiled from existing community resources, with additional input from state and national sources, such as the US Census. Following this Introduction, the Existing Conditions Report is divided into several chapters:

Chapter 2 – PERSPECTIVE: Context, History, and Planning

Heritage. This chapter provides a historical context for planning in the Town of Amherst. It provides useful information on past policies and recommendations related to land use and the built environment. Additional information is provided on the Town's geography, regional context, and the historic growth of the area (particularly that spurred by institutions of higher learning).

Chapter 3 – PEOPLE: Demographics. This chapter details Amherst's demographic breakdown. It provides data about historic population trends and future growth projections. It also provides descriptive information about the characteristics of the current population, as well as the relationship between population growth and developed land.

Chapter 4 – PLACE: Natural and Cultural Resources. This chapter characterizes the unique natural environment of Amherst. Water resources, flood plains, prime agricultural land, and wetlands are all discussed in regards to preservation and development policies. The chapter also examines the Town's cultural resources, including its literary heritage, is historic architecture, and the cultural resources found at the University and Colleges.

Chapter 5 – PLACE: Natural Environment - Open Space and Recreation. This chapter provides an overview of the parks, open spaces, trails, and recreational facilities located within Amherst. Maintaining open space has long been a priority within Amherst and this chapter examines the various approaches the community has used to preserve its unique landscapes.

Chapter 6 – PLACE: Built Environment – Land Use. This chapter helps to define the patterns and trends that have emerged in building and developing within Amherst. While exploring the historical context of development, reserve areas and protected lands, comparisons are also made between building data such as the number of permits issued and population data, drawing important conclusions for the future of Amherst.

Chapter 7 – PLACE: Housing. This chapter examines available housing data and summarizes the household characteristics within Amherst. It provides background information on the type of residential development that has taken place in recent years, as well as details related to housing vacancy and affordability.

Chapter 8 – COMMUNITY: Services and Facilities. This chapter details data regarding the water system, wastewater collection and treatment, stormwater and drainage, street lighting, capacity for future growth, and utility master plan considerations for Amherst. It also looks at Amherst's schools, libraries, police, fire, and other Town services. The chapter assesses the capacity of Town services

and facilities in light of development trends and demographic changes.

Chapter 9 – PLACE: Mobility. This chapter investigates the issues related to transportation, traffic, safety, and non-motorized modes of transportation while placing Amherst within a regional context. It looks at existing and proposed transportation improvements and provides an analysis of future transportation issues.

Chapter 10 – PROSPERITY: Economic Development. This chapter examines employment and job growth trends in Amherst, while recognizing the tremendous impact the University and Colleges have upon the Town's economy. Real estate trends and retail sales are also analyzed and help to determine the current economic status and potential for growth and diversification.